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A PACK OF FOXHOUNDS

BY
VISCOUNT GALWAY

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A PACK OF FOXHOUNDS.

By VISCOUNT GALWAY.

ONE not unfrequently hears the remark made that such-and-such a pack has gone downhill ; the hounds do not hunt as they used to ; they won't draw ; they can't catch their foxes, &c., &c. Poor hounds ! Why this wholesale condemnation of them, and why is the old saying, and such a true one, too, so frequently forgotten ?

“ A pack of hounds is what its

huntsman makes it." The foxhound which, for many generations, has been bred with the greatest care so as to develop all the instincts and qualities necessary for it to find, hunt and kill its quarry, is a very intelligent animal. Let the hound understand what the huntsman wants, let it be quite satisfied that the huntsman desires to encourage and assist it in every way, and it will readily and cheerfully respond. But if at the moment any difficulty arises and it wishes to use its natural instincts it is driven off to follow the huntsman's horse, can the result be wondered at? A well bred pack of hounds, if they get well settled to a fox on a fair scenting day, will run as well and cheerfully as ever ; but if they are interfered with as soon as any check arises,

their keenness must naturally diminish.

With a Mastership of thirty-one years during which I regularly hunted my own hounds myself, four days a week, I had every opportunity of watching and studying the various characteristics of the hounds, their different style of working and their reasoning instinct, and it is the deductions from my experiences that I am now writing down.

THE PACK.

I do not propose to go into the question of the shape of the foxhound, with the regular statements of neck and shoulders, legs and feet, quality, &c., but I should like to say that I believe a hound of medium size, with good round ribs, is more likely to

be seen running at the head of the pack late in the afternoon, than a flat-sided hound of twenty-five inches high.

Hounds should not be bred for looks alone, but for work and from work, as with careful selection good looks can also be secured. A mute hound should never be bred from ; a mute hound can never give any assistance to the pack nor to the huntsman, either in covert or in the open. On the contrary I am sure many of my readers can call to mind what might have been a good run being spoilt by a hound having got four or five fields ahead unseen and unheard. Tongue is essential for any pack. It is not merely exhilarating for all to hear, but it keeps the pack together, and I am sure that hounds with a good cry run more

cheerfully and harder. The huntsman should very carefully watch this, as if it begins to diminish it wants great care and patience to regain.

The Skirter also should never be bred from. When I first took hounds an experienced old Master told me that, as a rule, it was better not to in-breed except at the interval of one generation. To make the meaning of this clear let us say that two bitches B and C are put to a dog A, the whelps of these litters should not be mated, but their next generation can well be, as this would give two strains of the blood A at the interval of one generation.

Hunting regularly four advertised days a week, I kept a pack of fifty-five couples, thirty couple of bitches and twenty-five of dogs. I hunted the dog and

bitch pack entirely separate, and I think for good reasons. The way each sex works is somewhat different, and I think they are better unmixed. The dog and bitch pack are invariably kennelled separately, fed separately, and walked out separately, with the result that every hound knows every other hound in its own pack and its characteristics well ; consequently they are more likely to work well with and have confidence in hounds they know thus thoroughly ; you can in this way also have a more level and sorty pack. I put the standard of my bitches at 21 to 23 inches, the dogs 22 to 24 inches, and any puppy that came in from walk over 24 inches was drafted at once, no matter how good looking. The cry, too, of each sex separate is more harmonious, and

the crash made by eighteen to twenty couples of dog hounds running determinedly for their fox is very fine.

CUBHUNTING.

During the summer the huntsman will have been getting the entry handy, and at a later period getting the whole pack into fit condition with feet well hardened on the road for cub-hunting. It is a good policy while thus exercising the hounds for the huntsman to call at several farms. The farmer and his wife will like the act of courtesy, and occasionally, perhaps, some hitherto unknown grievance may be brought to light which a little tactful conversation may smooth over and remove.

It is very important that hounds should be got thoroughly

fit before cubhunting, as it is very prejudicial for hounds, especially young ones, to get tired with the hot weather.

The two objects of cubhunting are to train the hounds and thoroughly frighten the cubs, and the Master should insist on these two main principles being observed. It is not advisable to begin with large woodlands, medium size coverts are the best for the first fortnight. If, soon after the hounds are put in a cub crosses a ride, hounds should not be holloed to it, but should be left to go on drawing and thus learn the lesson of finding their own fox. Hounds should never be allowed to go away with an old fox; all cubs should be held up at first so that they may be thoroughly frightened, and hounds should not be allowed to

go away with a cub so long as there are any left in the covert.

The entry will naturally at first all stay with the huntsman, who should not trot about with them up and down the rides, but stand still at intervals with the result that the young hounds, hearing and seeing the old hounds running and crossing the rides, will get bored with doing nothing and will go and join their friends. On no account should any attempt ever be made to drive young hounds into covert. When there are only one or two cubs left in the covert, the huntsman should concentrate the pack on one cub and stick to him till they kill him. A great fuss should then be made at baying the fox and encouraging the young hounds, as I firmly believe the more savage a pack is at breaking up their fox the more

determinedly will they run to kill him. A brace of cubs is enough to kill out of any one litter. To kill more does hounds no good, and disappoints those who have kept the cubs all the summer and who hoped to see their covert a sure find all the season. If more work is wanted for hounds it is better to go and draw other coverts than to go and kill a good cub who has gone about a mile away and lain down in a spinney, as that fox will probably give a good run in the season.

It is a mistake to draw a potato field if the tops are at all knocked down by frost, as it is almost impossible in that case for a fox to get away from the hounds, and to kill a fox in this manner does hounds no good.

There is also a danger of chopping a fox in a turnip field

unless it is drawn very slowly and with a certain amount of noise.

I am not sure that the present method of advertising cubhunting meets does not put the huntsman sometimes in a false position. Some ardent spirits may ask him : " Let us have a gallop this morning ? " forgetting the principles upon which cubhunting is done, and also that a farmer does not like his land ridden over, his stock let out, and gaps inevitably made in his fences owing to the blindness of the country thus early in the autumn.

THE SEASON. DRAWING A COVERT.

Hounds start more cheerfully to draw a covert if they are kept back about 20 or 30 yards from

the covert for a few minutes, and then cheered into it.

Woodlands of course are always drawn up-wind, or taking advantage of a side wind as much as possible ; gorse and blackthorn coverts are drawn down-wind with two or three blasts of the horn to put a fox on his legs before the hounds are put in. As soon as the hounds have been put into the woodlands the huntsman should get into some ride that runs parallel with the portion he is drawing, but he should invariably keep behind the hounds while drawing and he should give the hounds plenty of time to spread out and draw. If he gets on some distance in front of the hounds, two things may happen : the hounds hearing him in front will hurry on to get up to him without troubling to draw, and

the fox hearing him and apprehending danger in front may possibly be chopped, or else slipping back through the hounds will be holloaed, at the end where the hounds were put in, and the sapient remark made, "The hounds have drawn over him as usual."

If a fox is holloaed away at the far end of the covert a huntsman should not go as hard as ever he can race to the holloa, but, blowing his horn, go at such a pace that all the hounds, which have been spread out over the covert while drawing, should have time to get up to him so that he can lay the hounds on the scent in a body.

Hounds do not like being left behind; if they find that by spreading out over the covert they get a bad start, and have to

get through horses to get to the pack, they will cease to run that risk and no longer spread out to draw as they ought to.

The same rule applies also when a covert is drawn blank, and the huntsman should always give time for all the hounds to get to him before he trots off to draw another covert. I believe a few people think that it helps hounds to draw and find a fox if the huntsman rides through the covert with them. But this is a mistake. Hounds seeing the huntsman in the covert with them strive to keep up with his horse instead of looking for their fox, and it is a disappointment to the owner of the covert that a fox will probably not make his kennel and lie for some time in that portion of the covert where the huntsman's horse has been

wandering about. Whippers-in should be encouraged by the huntsman to take every opportunity of counting the hounds, especially when they leave a covert.

THE HORN.

The huntsman should have five distinct "calls" on his horn. The first a short plain blast, to be used whether in drawing covert, attracting attention of the hounds, and letting the hounds know where he is in big woodlands. Another when he wants the hounds quick to him, such as when he sees a fox crossing a ride, &c., and this can possibly best be done by a few short blasts, such as "Tut, tut, tut." Then he should have a clear and definite longer drawn-out call to

ndicate when the fox has gone away from the covert, and the Master should determinedly insist that hounds never go away without this being done.

The Field, at the Master's request, are usually concentrated in some one place so as to give the fox every opportunity of going away, and they have a right to expect that they should know when the fox leaves the covert. Then he should have a long-drawn-out blast to stop hounds whether from running on a wrong line or for any other reason. With a similar blast I saved my pack on three occasions from getting on a railway in front of an express. Then another blast for either the kill or a run to ground, and this is possibly best done by imitating as much as possible the well-known cry " Who-whoop ! "

IN THE OPEN. CASTING HOUNDS.

Now that the hounds are settled down and running well the huntsman has time to consider future possibilities. By the way, if he should happen to jump into a bean or wheat field, it is good policy for the huntsman to call out "'Ware beans," &c., "Furrows," as it will please the farmers to see him setting a good example, and anxious to avoid doing unnecessary damage.

When a check occurs hounds should not be spoken to, but allowed to swing and make their own cast without interference. Of course there are exceptions to this. If the hounds have run on to a field covered with manure or lime, they should then be cast along the hedge all round the field without delay. There is also going to a reliable holloa, &c.

While watching the hounds making their own cast the huntsman has time to consider in what way he can best assist them to recover the line. If in the field in front of them there is a plough or cart, or if on a road a cart or pedestrian, it must always be remembered that it is four or five minutes since the fox was where the check occurred, and the plough and pedestrian would be in quite a different place. The position of the horse will be a certain guide as to the direction in which the plough and cart were moving, and it will not be difficult to calculate about where they were five minutes sooner, and what influence their position then would have on the fox's movements. With regard to the pedestrian, information should be got from him as soon as possible

as to what direction he was walking in. When the huntsman has made good, say to the left of where the check occurred, and wants to try the other side, he should call his hounds to him, either by voice or a touch of the horn, and then gallop across the ground, already made good, but should pull up to a walk about thirty yards from the fresh ground, so as to allow a good many hounds to go on in front of him.

When casting hounds the huntsman should always have many hounds in front of him and the others on the side towards which the fox was travelling. A huntsman should never make a cast with all the hounds behind him following his horse, with possibly the whipper-in putting them on to him, as they have

then no opportunity of properly using their noses. A whipper-in too should never be allowed to be outside the hounds and driving them towards the huntsman, as in that case, if they should happen to cross the line of the fox, they must inevitably take it heelway.

It is a mistake to make the first cast too wide as much time may be lost by doing so. While hounds are running it is interesting to consider what may be in the fox's mind, and what point he is going for ; but it is very dangerous to get too confident on this subject. I have seen a huntsman so satisfied that a fox must be going for a certain covert that he fruitlessly made the same point good three times over, though in wider circles each time, and utterly neglected

the other side of where the check originally took place.

Hounds should never be driven for any long distance to the huntsman, but the huntsman should go to fetch them himself. The field should never follow the huntsman about while he is casting hounds.

THE BEATEN FOX.

It must always be remembered that the more tired a fox is the less scent there is with him, and it is consequently a great risk to take the hounds off the line however faint it may be, to make a forward cast, as it is almost impossible to recover the scent. The only way is to stick steadily on the line and trust to getting nearer to him. Great caution is required when you go up to a holloa and the excited pedestrian

says : " He's dead beat and just gone through that hedge " ; and it is very risky to take hounds and make a cast on the other side of that hedge. What most likely has happened would be that the pedestrian saw the fox in the middle of a field going towards that hedge. He would then look out for the hounds and holloa for them, and when the pedestrian looked round he would not see the fox any more and come to the conclusion he had gone through the hedge he told you of. What the fox would probably do as soon as he saw the man and heard the holloa would be to turn down a furrow, or even the hedge side, and thus all trace of him be lost. The only way is to take hounds and put them on at the place where the pedestrian actually saw the fox

last. If the beaten fox gets among the small orchards that usually run from the houses on the village street, it is good policy to send a whipper-in to the far end of the village. While hounds are going through these orchards the villagers should be got to look in all likely places where the fox may have hid himself—a cart-shed or open door of a stable are very likely places to tempt the fox to lie up.

If in the evening a question is asked : " What sort of sport was there to-day ? " and the answer is, " A capital fifty minutes, seven mile point and a kill ; there were two checks but the hounds soon recovered the line by themselves," a huntsman can take this as a great compliment, as it shows he has trained a pack of hounds to find, hunt, and kill their fox by themselves.

As I said at the beginning of these notes, a foxhound is a very intelligent animal, and I should like to conclude with an anecdote of a favourite old hound.

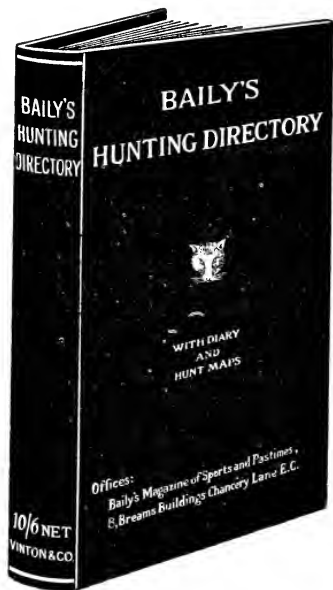
Meeting towards the end of March on light, sandy soil, after hunting a fox for about fifteen minutes, we ran on to a dry, dusty, new-sown field. The hounds all swung away to the right and I sat still watching to see if they hit off the line when they got to the hedge. I suddenly felt something on my left foot, and looking round I saw a favourite old dog, Pedlar, resting his head on my foot. I said, "Hullo, old man!" and the moment the old dog saw I had noticed him, he galloped straight away to the hedge, about fifty yards to the left, then going down

the hedge side by himself, after he had gone some little way he suddenly threw his tongue as he hit off his fox through the hedge. My readers may call this intellect, reasoning power, a brain-wave, or whatever they like ; I shall not try to define it but simply content myself with saying, "The old dog did it." And now,

We must all go out hunting to-day,
The face of all nature looks gay.
Let us join the glad throng
That goes laughing along,
And we'll all go out hunting to-day.

Gay

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